STATEMENT OF

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Hearing on K-12 STEM Education Across the Federal Agencies
Thursday, March 30, 2006 at 10:00 a.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

I am pleased the Committee is holding this hearing today. Bolstering the science, technology, engineering and math education of our children is one of the most important issues facing our nation. Without a strong education in these areas, our country will not thrive. I am thrilled that many of my colleagues and the Administration recognize the need and are taking steps to address K-12 STEM educational improvements.

Mr. Chairman, I strongly support the President's call to maintain the competitive ability of the United States in an increasingly innovative world economy. His American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI) requests focused funding on areas that will improve STEM education and promote domestic innovation and economic productivity. It is a bold and ambitious approach to keeping America at the forefront of research and education by increasing the numbers of highly qualified math and science teachers, expanding high school advanced placement offerings, and providing workforce skills training to some 800,000 workers annually.

While I am heartened by the commitment the Administration's request shows for the fundamental research budget at National Science Foundation (NSF), I would like to register my concern that the education programs at the NSF as well as other agencies have not been included in the ACI. NSF is the primary federal supporter of science and math education; it underwrites the development of the next generation of scientists and engineers. While the overall budget of NSF increases almost 8 percent, the Education and Human Resources directorate experiences a modest 2.5 percent increase and a dramatic restructuring. This is a continuing, but distressing, trend for NSF to move away from their K-12 educational mission and to focus solely on graduate education and activities to broaden participation in STEM fields. Decreasing the role of NSF in education seems very shortsighted when we are currently facing the challenge of adequately preparing our students to enter science and technology fields.

The ACI dedicates new funds to a "Math Now" Initiative to improve math in elementary and middle schools. While I am certainly pleased the President is focusing on this area at the Department of Education, I believe we need to have a parallel "Science Now" Initiative to isolate and promote effective science teaching. Tackling the disciplines one by one does a disservice to our students. Even with our limited resources, we must find ways not to rob a child of science education because we believe they should

learn other subjects first. Each child deserves a strong background in math, reading and science. A Science Panel could also examine the issue of high school sequencing of science coursework. Because our nation is extremely transitory, coupled with the local structure of education, a student who changes school districts may miss a year of science because the coursework is not offered in the same order. There must be an optimal sequence to offer such coursework and a Science Panel could help determine this

The emphasis today is coordination. It is imperative that the agencies work together on STEM education, acknowledging common goals and leveraging limited resources. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how their agencies are coordinating their STEM education efforts, and about their unique strengths.